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Johann Adam Moehler : the method of historical theology

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This thesis is a study of Johann Adam Moehler's critical theology as an achievement in the nineteenth century's quest for a historical methodology. As the first Catholic theologian to apply a critical-historical analysis to the development of doctrine, Moehler is important as both the theologian and as a German historian.

As the theologian, Moehler's efforts to discover the essential meaning of Christian doctrine led him to conclude that doctrine develops within a human context of experience, namely, the Catholic Church. This development of doctrine is possible given the organic nature of the Christian community and its relationship to the divine. It is only the subjective form which doctrine assumes at different stages in life of the Church that is susceptible to change. The objective truth of Christian principles remains immutable.

As the historian, Moehler applied a critical method, symbolism, to his theological subject matter. By an objective investigation of the symbols of Protestantism and Catholicism, he felt that the essential differences and the meanings of the respective confessions could be properly analyzed. History, as the proper framework in which to acquire the objective meaning of the Catholic experience, is the common denominator between Christ and his institution, the Church, and remains the only means of justifying its continued existence.

This study of Moehler's ideas begins with a discussion of the historical context in which Moehler lived and by which he was influenced. This discussion highlights the German Aufklärung and its reaction to the French Enlightenment, the romantic movement as it uniquely developed in Germany, and the rise of the Tübingen School as the locus of romantic Catholic theology in the early nineteenth century. The second chapter relates the details of Moehler's biography, particularly as a member of the Tübingen theological faculty. In the third chapter Moehler's critical theology is discussed as it reflects his historical consciousness and his methodology. The fourth chapter consists of a review of the literature written about Moehler as well as some interesting interpretations of his concepts and their consequences. Finally, the conclusion attempts to place Moehler in a perspective to his German philosophical heritage and to the historical theories of his time as a historical theologian.

JOHANN ADAM MOEHLER: THE METHOD OF HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> That a theologican should be well versed in history is shown by the fate of those who, through ignorance of history, have fallen into error . . . Whenever we theologians preach, argue, or explain Holy Writ, we enter the domain of history.
> Melchoir Canus, Loc. Theol., b. XI, c. ii[1]*

This thesis is a study of Johann Adam Moehler's critical theology as an achievement in the nineteenth century's quest for a historical methodology. As the first Catholic theologian to apply a critical-historical analysis to the development of doctrine, Moehler is important as both the theologian and as a German historian.

As the theologian, Moehler's efforts to discover the essential meaning of Christian doctrine led him to conclude that doctrine develops within a human context of experience, namely, the Catholic Church. This development of doctrine is possible given the organic nature of the Christian community and its relationship to the divine. By studying the periods of doctrinal crisis within the Church, particularly the Reformation, in a scientific, objective manner, Moehler felt that the divine truth would make itself apparent. It is only the subjective form which doctrine assumes at different stages in life of the Church that is susceptible to change. The objective truth of Christian principles remains immutable. Hence,

*Footnote references appear at the end of each chapter.

the Catholic Church, as the source of tradition of which doctrine is an objective aspect, remains the only context in which doctrinal certainty and stability are possible.

As the historian, Moehler applied a critical method, symbolism, to his theological subject matter. By an objective investigation of the symbols of Protestantism and Catholicism, he felt that the essential differences and the meanings of the respective confessions could be properly analyzed. By "symbols" he meant the historical evidence or testimony as contained in the writings of the Church Fathers and the Reformers, proceedings of church councils, and other such documentary narratives as they profess to relate respective doctrinal truths. Moehler recognized history as the human context in which even theology must be placed. His awareness of the relativism of history as well as the human process is shown by the careful analysis he gives to the subjective and objective senses of his concepts of the Church, tradition, and doctrine. History, as the proper framework in which to acquire the objective meaning of the Catholic experience, is the common denominator between Christ and his institution, the Church, and remains the only means of justifying its continued existence.

My study of Moehler's ideas begins with a discussion of the historical context in which Moehler lived and by which he was influenced. This discussion highlights the German Aufklärung and its reaction to the French Enlightenment, the romantic movement as it uniquely developed in Germany, and the rise of the Tübingen School as the locus of romantic Catholic theology in the early nineteenth century. The second chapter relates the details of Moehler's biography, particularly as a member

of the Tübingen theological faculty. In the third chapter Moehler's critical theology is discussed as it reflects his historical consciousness and his methodology. The fourth chapter consists of a review of the literature written about Moehler as well as some interesting interpretations of his concepts and their consequences. Finally, the conclusion attempts to place Moehler in a perspective to his German philosophical heritage and to the historical theories of his time as a historical theologian.

CHAPTER I

FOOTNOTES

[1]Quotation appears on the title page to Rev. Reuben Parsons' Studies in Church History, Vol. IV (New York: Fr. Pustet & Co., 1897).

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND TO THE RISE OF THE CATHOLIC TÜBINGEN SCHOOL

As a result of years of religious wars, Germany was divided into a Protestant north and a Catholic south. The prevailing catholicity and the imperial sanction of the Hapsburg dynasty conferred upon Austria the predominance of the south and the leadership of both the German Empire and the German Catholic Church. This political-religious situation had a decided effect on the course of the German Enlightenment in the eighteenth century as well as on the ensuing Catholic Renaissance in the nineteenth century.

Due in part to the political conditions in Germany at the time, the influence of Enlightenment ideas in Germany was quite different than in France. This type of generalization can be made about Germany as a whole because, although this discussion will concentrate on the Catholic developments in the south, much the same political situation existed in the Protestant north under the rule of Brandenburg-Prussia and the Lutheran Church. According to Henri Daniel-Rops, "The emphasis was so different that one could almost speak of an original school. . . ,"[1] composed of the unique German characteristics of the Lutheran biblical tradition, the Germanic sense of nature, and the German love of the practical. These elements in totality are referred to as the German Aufklärung, a movement that was notably cultural and social as compared to the developments of the French Enlightenment.

While inspired by the critical rationalism of French philosophes, the German Aufklärung did not mean a rationalistic philosophy so much as a rationalizing reformation.[2] Religion, as the object of this reformation, was a dominant theme in the writing of the eighteenth century. "The self-appointed task of the Aufklärung was to place religion beneath the powerful ray of reason and dispel the shadows."[3] In so doing, as distinct from the French Enlightenment's attack upon religion, "no German in the eighteenth century employed the sarcasm or introduced into debate the flippant mockery of Voltaire, Diderot, and Bolingbrooke."[4] Rather, there seemed to be underlying even the more critical attempts at religious reform, the notion of religion as desirable, needing at this point in time only to be reformed and renewed in its essential meaning.

German reform efforts were by no means undeserving of criticism. There were radical expressions of reforming zeal which, though positive in their desire to effect change in the state of religion in Germany, were not entirely concerned with the content of religious meaning. Two such expressions, febronism and josephism, were particularly related to the situation in Germany. The febronist doctrine is important, moreover, as the inspiration of the josephist program. It was partially in reaction to these two political forms of religion that the developments of the nineteenth century took place in Germany.

Even in the estimation of the German clergy the Church was in a sad state of affairs in mid-eighteenth century. Fashionable as <u>enlightenment</u> ideas had made criticism of old, established institutions such as the Catholic Church, there was some justification for anticlerical

invectives. The German clergy had undergone a corrupting decline because of its strategic position in and relationship to German politics. In contrast to the clergy's own moral decay and laxity, the existence of rigid, tyrannical laws governing religious practices of both the secular and spiritual realms further served to widen the gap between religion as preached and religion as practiced. The tradition of superstitious usages and practices common in the popular ranks of religion manifested yet on another plane the need for Church reform in the eighteenth century.

Reform from above was instigated during the reign of Empress Maria Theresia. They consisted most importantly of attempts to bring the clergy and its privileges under closer civil supervision by calling for imperial sanction prior to the promulgation of papal bulls and the taxation of all Church lands. Her efforts, however, were undertaken at the behest of

> would be innovators, who wanted only a little courage to become as dangerous as the Jansenists; who needed only more consistency to become more powerful than the Gallicans . . . and were, to a man, courtier theologians.[5]

It was the role of the papacy within the Church that gave rise to the mid-century outburst of febronist reform from within the clergy itself. Febronism, a radical expression of the German clerical reform mentality was particularly popular among the northern Catholic clergy as an attempt to convert Protestants by restricting papal authority. Published in Brussels in 1763, the Book of Justin Febronious on the Present Condition of the Church was actually written by John Nicholas von Hontheim, auxillary bishop of the Elector of Treves. The ideas

contained in this work, though often contradictory and unclear, formed the anti-papal doctrines of febronist reform. The Church was a kind of republic which had been undermined by papal usurpation and concentration of power. Febronious wished to return to a modified state of the Hohenstaufen submission of the Church to the civil power, as representing a time when the pope was properly a symbol, nothing more. His arguments on these themes called for a reformation by a general council of all Christians of the abuse of the Roman Church by the pope. The symbol of Febronious' aversion to papal power was his refusal to recognize the bull Unigenitus, a condemnation of Jansenism in 1713 as contained in the 101 propositions written by Quesnel.[6]

Febronism as a doctrine had little to offer except its rabid anti-papal attitude. Its importance as an overt manifestation of clerical resentment of papal attempts to assert power over local churches and autonomous bishops, however, should not be discounted. Febronist ideas also bore fruit in the politics of the south, an indication of the extent of its influence.

In the south, Joseph II carried the reform of both Church and State to such an extent that his reign was designated as enlightened despotism. Guided by the idea of a centralized empire developing from within as an indivisible whole, Joseph set out to create an episcopal and territorial church. His program of Church reform in conjunction with his concept of the state became known as josephism. Although josephism was a political program, its emphasis on papal non-involvement in the affairs of the German Church recalled the spiritual goals of febronism--the former being a doctrine of the church against papal power

in the bishops' favor. Josephist reform, however sincerely inspired by its namesake's vision of his despotism, was a pretext for permanent state intervention. Its gallicanism succeeded in causing a "religious revolution, a systematic overthrow of all that the Church believed inviolable."[7] With the end of Joseph's reign, however, the religious issue so inextricably bound to the politics of the German nation became amazingly apolitical, became confined to the romantic writings of various university circles in both the north and the south of Germany.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the German theologian had moved to a higher phase of religious criticism than almost any other group in Europe, particularly in France. There had been common agreement in Europe on the sterility of Catholic ideas as embodied by the Roman Church. In Germany, however, the negative, destructive criticism of religion by enlightenment thought never gained the strong foothold it had at this time in other countries. German writers believed that their literature held the potential for emancipating the old religion from its superstitions and inconsistencies. This line of thinking represented the increasing romantic tendencies of German writing, particularly with regard to the meaning and content of religion.

The general effect of German romanticism in the sphere of faith was to produce "a Romantic religion of the heart, aclerical rather than anti-clerical, incipiently Protestant, and perhaps more importantly incipiently ecumenical."[8] The early spokesmen for the romantic revitalization of religion were, for the most part, Protestant theologians. Given the tradition of the Reformation's critical humanism and the

relative freedom enjoyed by Protestant faculties in the northern universities under the Prussians, religious ferment was strongest in the north of Germany. Theology was rejected by these thinkers as the source of fanaticism. Emphasis was placed rather on feeling as "intense, unintellectualized religious experience"[9] and as the basis of the individual's religious faith. A plethora of treatises on the source and meaning of religious experience appeared, forming a considerable part of German romantic literature into the nineteenth century. These works dealt with the whole question of faith and its meaning in a rational world, conceding it to be a part of man's cultural experience. Although Christianity was the specific brand of faith most writing was about, almost every form of articulated religious belief was scrutinized in the effort to derive the real essence of religion.

The German romantic sought to understand the existence of religion as an expression of a fundamental German need however irrational. In particular, he viewed his role as being a leader in the search for a new meaning of faith and religion, one which could not be denied by rational intellectualization. Many of all religious affiliations wrote of this new faith of rediscovered sentiment. Novalis, writing in the romantic circle at Jena in the 1790's, strongly urged the revival and acceptance of religion's importance to man and society--

> Only by a more accurate knowledge of religion will it be possible to judge better those fearful products of religious sleep, those dreams and deliria of the sacred organ, and only then to assess properly the importance of that gift. Phantoms rule where there are no gods . . . [10]

by those who had rejected it as being devoid of meaning for modern,

enlightened men--

> Come then, you philanthropists and encyclopedists, into the peace-making lodge and receive the brotherly kiss, take off the grey veil and look with young love at the magnificence of nature, of history and of mankind. I will lead you to a brother who shall speak to you so that your hearts will open and you will resuscitate the presentiment so dear to you, and embrace it again, recognizing what you had dimly comprehended but which, with your awkward earthly reason, you were unable fully to grasp. This brother is the pulse of the modern age.[11]

Novalis included in his acceptance of religion the importance of the study of nature, of history, and of mankind. This indicates a new trend towards viewing the modern man's situation through the integrating study of various elements of his experience and culture, an idea which was to find fertile ground in nineteenth century Germany.

Another prominent spokesman of a romantic religion was Friedrich Schleiermacher. As a product of Pietist Moravian background and as a central figure in the German romantic movement, he rejected discursive knowledge considering religion as rather a feeling.

> Religion is essentially contemplative . . . The contemplation of the pious is the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things, in and through the Infinite, and all things in and through the Eternal. Religion is to seek this and find in it all that lives and moves, in all growth and change, in all doing and suffering. It is to have life and to know life in immediate feeling only as such an existence in the Infinite and Eternal. Where this is found religion is satisfied, where it hides itself, there is for her unrest and anguish, extremity and death.[12]

This passage contains a variety of philosophical influences, ranging from Kant to Hegel. The relativism which this concept of religion embraces complements a diversity of faiths and religious practices. The attempt to universalize the religious experience, on the other hand, also contained in the statement, represents yet another current

of the new direction in which the German romantic was headed. Important as religion and theological criticism were in the German Aufklärung, ". . . it was never more than one element in a varied scene . . . ,"[13] denoting the breadth and depth of German Romanticism.

There remained, however, an area of specific religious content, namely the Catholicism of the Roman Church, which had to be reconciled to nineteenth century romantic's vision of religion. This became the task of Catholic theologians who saw potential in the romantic movement as "its underlying impulse was a grasp of the relation between religion and culture, only fully realized in a Catholic context."[14] Between 1810 and 1840, the romantic current in theology sought to regain through a sense of the past, particularly in the writings of the Church Fathers and of the Schclastics, a new sense of their own speculation and contemplation of the truths of the faith.

A Frenchman, writing at the turn of the twentieth century about the state of Catholicism in Germany as it entered the nineteenth century, described the dilemma of the Catholic theologian as dogmatic intransigence. Georges Goyau, in his five-volume work on German religion, contended that Catholic theologians, faced with the Protestant theologian's separation of dogma and morals, had to rescue the faith from its own anemia, caused by a dogmatic intransigence which had left Catholicism without a reason or a patrimony to exist.[15] The effort became, as Goyau interprets the developments, one of creating a new sense of faith which could incorporate a kind of "moralé superieure" to be sustained semi-independently of dogma. This would require a more integral participation by the priest in the interpretation and

dissemination of the revealed message of God.

A major flaw in the attempts to unify Catholicism had been the veiling of what was essential to the faith by certain "state" philosophers. Catholic faculties of theology and canon law itself seemed to urge clerics to take a defensive attitude towards the supernatural aspects of the Church's doctrine, leading them to "be vaccinated against the Roman influence by a sufficient dose of rationalist ideas."[16] The dilemma was that the necessary knowledge for the formation of a popular religion contrasted strangely with the pedagogical ideal defined by the Council of Trent.[17] With the romantic tendency towards the elimination of rationalism, there was an immediate demand for the reunion of morals and dogma in order to create some norm. The German Catholic theologian set about to ascertain the genius of Catholicism through the renewal of the Catholic idea of organism as best exemplified in the old religion of the Middle Ages.

The Tübingen School was the name given to two schools of theology, whose chief exponents were connected with the University of Tübingen either as its professors or its students.[18] The two schools of theology that fall under the auspices of Tübingen are distinctive from each other in both chronological development and theological perspective; however, their combined impact on the university's perspective substantiates the unique contribution of this school to nineteenth century German theology.

The first school, the Old Tübingen School, best represented by Gottlieb Christian Storr, championed biblical supernaturalism resisting "the so-called theology which had sprung up in the latter half of the

eighteenth century which saw in positive and orthodox Christianity an enemy of progress and humanity."[19] Storr, an advocate of the authority of divine revelation, sought by grammatical and historical exegesis to build up a system of theology with special emphasis on the "evidential value of miracles."[20] In contrast to Kantian rationalism he maintained that systems of theology and morals were to be founded on the results of exegesis rather than upon the mere processes of ratiocination.

The effects of combining exegetical studies with a basic belief in supernaturalism were to have their consequence in a later phase of the Tübingen School. The immediate effect was to strike a blow against making religion a function of human reason in a transitory stage of a growing theological revival:

> It was the idea of supernaturalism, the idea that in Christianity something more than human powers and blessings is conferred, that these men fought for with zeal, and literary and exegetical skill. Theirs is the merit of having defended the inheritance of the Fathers, and preserved it for a better period . . . [21]

In the early nineteenth century the second Tübingen School under F.C. Baur achieved a degree of greatness as representing an aspect of the romantic Protestant revival. The school's greatness closely paralleled in characteristics and duration the philosophical and theological phases of its chief spokesman, Baur. Baur went through three distinctive periods of study and work. The first, lasting until 1835, centered on studies of the history of Christian doctrines. Baur then moved on to critical investigations of the contents and origins of the New Testament until 1848, at which time until 1860, he worked on historical studies.

Baur's Tendenzkritik sought, through the application of Hegelian

philosophy, to distinguish Christianity as the absolute religion by virtue of the purely moral nature of its events, teachings, and demands.[22] The interpretation and importance he attached to the Pauline doctrine reflected his orthodox Lutheran persuasion. Although his denial of miracles, especially the resurrection, disavows the supernaturalism of the earlier Tübingen School, Baur's renewed emphasis on exegetical studies, particularly with regard to the primitive Church, reflects a tradition which can be said to have characterized Tübingen theologians.

The history of the Tübingen School to this point has necessarily emphasized the Protestant view of theological matters because until 1817 there was no Catholic counterforce located at Tübingen. In that year, however, the Catholic faculty of Ellwangen relocated its five chairs of theology at Tübingen. A Catholic house of study known as the Wilhelmstift was also established to counterbalance the existence of the Lutheran seminary. This relocation was significant, as Goyau pointed out, because of the five members of the Ellwangen faculty, three professors had a "renowned ignorance."[23] The books used by that university were, for the most part, the works of rationalists and febronists.

The group of theologians comprising the Catholic Tübingen School followed a common line of thought, the main aim of which was to show the intrinsic justification of the Christian faith in the various realms of Catholic theology. The great achievement of the Catholic Tübingen School to this end was

> . . . in having understood that the objective study of history offered the best defense against the tide of rationalism and protestantism . . . a history that is living, organic development

> of an idea, an eternal plan unfolded by revelation; thus history required a theology and all theology is based on history.[24]

Through this concept of history, the romantic Catholic theologians sought to answer the question of the day, namely, of how a revelation given historically, known a posteriori--and still supernatural--could be decisive for the a priori subjectivity of human reason.[25] Their attempts to combine both the historical and the speculative aspects of theology resulted in the creation of a new, positive concept of the development of doctrine, reflecting allegiance to the tradition of the ancient Church, the unity of the Middle Ages, and to the great thinkers of the day such as Schelling, Schleiermacher and Hegel.

In 1819, the Tübinger Theologische Quartalschrift was established with the defined aims of reflecting " . . . the fermentation of ideas, the general culture of the theologian; the organic conception and systematizing of revelation, not as a fixed code, but as an organic plan unfolded in history . . . "[26] and representing the thinking of the movement in its entirety.

It was the individual work of J.S. Drey and J.B. Hirscher which initially sparked the Catholic Renaissance just beginning at Tübingen. Drey (1777-1835), as father of the school,[27] gave it his distinctive orientation which was to be reflected throughout the nineteenth century in the work of his successors: Moehler, Kuhn, Hefele, Funk, Schanz, Adam, and Geiselmann.[28] Attempting to revitalize ecclesiastical studies, Drey sought to grasp the rapport of Christianity with history as an aspect of the total organic unity, and Christianity with philosophy as the counterpart. He concluded that Christianity was a

living tradition which composed a transhistorical reality. This notion restored the possibility of historical facts, opening the way for theology as science or as systematic construction. In his Apologetic, Drey maintained that Christianity is a positive institution because it is divinely revealed. It is a "philosophy of revelation" manifested in history by the salvation drama and the Incarnation.[29]

Hirscher, as a contemporary of Drey at Tübingen, and an enemy of scholasticism and casuistry, wished to concentrate all Christian doctrine, dogma and morals in the evangelical notion of the kingdom of God. Integral in morals is the ascetic, and in dogma, morals. Theology, therefore, was to show in a unique manner the foundation, the development, and the life of the achievement of this reality of God's kingdom.

J.A. Moehler was the next great thinker in the chronology of the Tübingen movement's development. He has been said to have made the glory of the Tübingen School. He was the virtual master of German Catholic theology in the nineteenth century, and has, perhaps, been the most influential in terms of contemporary theology.[30] Moehler maintained and elaborated Drey and Hirscher's fundamental idea of a theological science, consisting of an exterior, historical reality, animated however by an interior principle. Harnack's praise of Moehler as "the representative of the most perfect and the expression of the greatest of Catholic theology in Germany"[31] serves to illustrate his importance to both Catholic theology and his recognition by German Protestantism into the end of the nineteenth century. As the great spokesman of the Tübingen romantic movement, Moehler built his system on that which came before him and he contributed to that which was to

come after him, reflecting what Tübingen characterized:

> The Tübingen School is characterized by an essential unity of thought. In the very multiplicity of its theological blueprints and the tensions of its own development, the Tübingen School is the classical representative of a dialectical theology within the framework of the Catholic mind.[32]

CHAPTER II

FOOTNOTES

[1]Henri Daniel-Rops, The Church in the Eighteenth Century, Image Books (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1966), p. 77.

[2]Alexander Dru, The Contribution of German Catholicism, Vol. 101 of Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism (200 vols.; New York: Hawthorne Books, 1963), p. 25.

[3]Rops, p. 78.

[4]Ibid., p. 77.

[5]Parsons, Studies in Church History, IV, 367.

[6]"Unigentius," The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XV (15 vols.; New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913), p. 128.

[7]Rops, p. 291.

[8]John B. Halsted, ed., Romanticism, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 21.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid., p. 134.

[11]Ibid., p. 135.

[12]Ibid., p. 141.

[13]Dru, p. 25.

[14]Ibid., p. 48.

[15]Georges Goyau, L'Allemagne religieuse: le catholicisme, (1800-1848), I (5 vols.; Paris: Pierre et Cie, Libraries-Editeurs, 1905), p. 162.

[16]Ibid., p. 163.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Max Albert von Landerer, "Tübingen," Vol. II of A Religious Encyclopedia: or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology, ed. by Philip Schaff, et al. (New York, 1883), p. 2398.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid,, p. 2399.

[22]"Tübingen, University of," The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XIV (15 vols.; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967), p. 339.

[23]Goyau, II, 25.

[24]A. Kervoorde and O. Rousseau, Le Mouvement Théologique dan le Monde Contemporain, chap. VI, p. 60.

[25]Elmar Klinger, "The Catholic Tubingen School," Vol. 6 of Sacramentum Mundi, ed. by Adolf Darlop, et al. (New York, 1970), p. 318.

[26]Dru, p. 68.

[27]Kervoorde and Rousseau, p. 60.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., p. 61.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Klinger, p. 320.

CHAPTER III

JOHANN ADAM MOEHLER--HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Johann Adam Moehler, the son of a German innkeeper and baker, was born May 6, 1796, in Igersheim, a village near Mergentheim in the Tauber valley. As a boy Moehler's job was to help in the family business. However, the gifted youth was not content with this role. By arrangement with his father he went to the gymnasium at Mergentheim and began to learn Latin grammar. In 1813, upon entering the lyceum at Ellwangen, Moehler manifested his intellectual prowess by taking first place in physics, applied mathematics, trigonometry and solid geometry. His real interests however lay in philosophical and theological studies to which he devoted himself in 1815 after being admitted to the Catholic faculty at Ellwangen. After leaving Ellwangen, he went to Tubingen to continue his studies in the university under the learned professors Drey and Hirscher.

The contrast between Ellwangen and Tübingen was great. At the former institution the instruction given left much to be desired. It remained elementary for the most part, having no study of theological tracts at all.[1] Also lacking were discipline and religious spirit because of rather than inspite of the enlightened liberalism that sought to suppress abuses and eliminate excesses.[2] Moehler, amidst this situation of temptations, managed to avoid the excesses of scandal and scrupulosity. Arriving at Tübingen which had just become the seat

of a new Catholic faculty of theology, Moehler passed into a more favorable learning situation. The presence of the older Protestant theological school and its students whose training and instruction were excellent supplied a much needed motivation and broader perspective.

In November of 1818, Moehler entered the seminary at Rottenburg to prepare for his ordination to the priesthood. Here again he found much lacking in the religious as well as the scientific course of studies. Students were, however, allowed to devote themselves fully to the disciplines of their choice in addition to the prescribed studies and religious exercises. This proved to have been well used by Moehler. On September 18, 1819, Moehler entered the ranks of the Catholic priesthood. For a short time before returning to Tübingen he served as vicar in the small towns of Weilderstadt and Riedlingen. During this period he met J.M. Sailer whose ideas of a "living Christianity" and tradition greatly influenced Moehler as a mature theologian. For the next two years Moehler studied at Tübingen, preparing to teach. In 1821 he became Repetent or a tutor in the Wilhelmstift. During this year Moehler studied classical literature exclusively, particularly early Greek history and philosophy. From these studies he acquired "the keeness and clearness of judgment, delicacy of diction, skill in exposition, and fine sense of the aesthetic which distinguish all his writings and discourses."[3] As a result, in 1822 the theological faculty at Tübingen offered him an appointment as privatdocent in church history. In preparation for this new role, Moehler left on a tour of studies which was to encompass in scope the leading German and Austrian universities and present him

to the best-known Catholic and Protestant theologians and pedogogues of the day.

Moehler's purpose for such a tour of German academia was his resolve to affect some change in the method and content of Catholic theological instruction. He had been greatly impressed by methods employed by Protestant faculties which had not been "half destroyed" by the secularization of the Church.[4] This journey through Germany may as well have been the turning point in Moehler's own intellectual development.[5] He was very inspired by the lectures of the historian Planck at Göttingen, more so perhaps than by any of the previous places or personalities he had come in contact with. Berlin, the capital of Prussia and the stronghold of Protestant, Nordic Germany, greatly impressed him although he was initially disconcerted by the new atmosphere. He rapidly became acclimatized to the university and its most prestigious professors. The lectures of Schleiermacher, Marheineke, and especially Neander left strong impressions upon his mind. The latter, Neander, revealed to Moehler "what history can be for one not content to amass little facts, but who communicates with the past and seizes the life beneath the institutions and the spirit beneath the doctrines."[6] It was in Berlin that Moehler discovered romantic history and saw the theories of Schleiermacher and the institutions of Herder as they could apply to the history of the Church. Returning to Tübingen in 1823 after passing through Breslau, Prague, Vienna and Munich, it remained, however, his stay in the Lutheran north which had transformed his ideas, making him more aware than ever before how committed to Catholicism and the rehabilitation of its theology he was.

Teaching and writing were now Moehler's life, invigorating his intellectual growth and spiritual reflection. In 1823 he began his association with the Theologische Quartalschrift through which he spoke out on various topical issues and revealed aspects of his thinking. In a review of Walter's Manual of Canon Law, Moehler applied himself to the entire subject as well as the specific book. His criticism that "what circumstances have allowed to succeed, man justifies"[7] was applied to historical situations in the Church's past, particularly the Church councils which operated because "the man with the greatest exterior force summoned it, the one with the greatest interior power presided, and the whole Church ratified it."[8] Moehler perceptively saw the simple relation of forces which was the basis of the Church's superiority over the State in the Middle Ages. Continuing in this critical vein, he inserted an attack on the "papal system". Moehler came out clearly as being hostile to papal infallibility by saying that to admit infallibility is to affirm that a doctrine is catholic, i.e., universal, only inasmuch as it is approved by a single member (the Pope). Moehler rather defended the "episcopal system" underwhich the pope is not a universal bishop with corresponding powers but rather is only the supreme executor of the canons, subject to error in matters of faith and capable of being judged by the universal Church.[9] In conclusion he felt the Church perverted itself because the use of force was inevitably involved by maintaining papal infallibility. He emphasized that the Church should recognize the individual's freedom of conscience as legitimate because the Church itself exists only by virtue of the conviction of its members based on an act of free judgment--"No

one remains in it without a constant renewal of this act of freedom."[10] Those professing erroneous opinions are no longer its members by lack of conviction. Moehler's criticism of the papacy in this review had some Febronist overtones which he later clarified to some extent but which continued to give him some cause for regret all his life.

Succeeding works published in the Quartalschrift between 1823 and 1827 reflected the tendency of Moehler "to move from outside to inside, from the forms to what they determine, from words and concepts to the lived experience."[11] In an article discussing the relationship of theology to philosophy (actually a critique of a contemporary work by Gengler) Moehler declined to separate evidence and faith by saying that "the idea of God is a fact of consciousness, and what could be more evident to us than such a fact?"[12] Faith then is not based on our belief in facts given to us, of which we have no experience; rather it is what is most interior and immediate to us, namely, the consciousness we have of our faith. Proofs of any aspect of faith cannot convince anyone who hasn't already that interior evidence. The proper task of the theologian then is not to prove but to expound and transmit the teachings of Christ and His apostles as the substance of the Church.

Explaining his conception of history in a paper published after his death[13] Moehler said:

> History is the development in time of the eternal plan of God for humanity, by which he prepares in it, through Christ, a worthy adoration and glorification of the free homage of man himself.[14]

With Christ as the focal point, history is divided into two parts, before and after his coming. From this Christian understanding of history,

Moehler defined Christian history or the history of the Church as "the successive developments of the light and of the principle of life which Christ communicates to humanity in order to reunite it to God and make it capable of glorifying him."[15] Moehler clarified this definition further in later works by studying Church history through the internal development of its spirit. Under the aspects of Doctrine, cult and organization the truth of Christ can be an object of history and the scientific study of theology.

Other articles written by Moehler in the Quartalschrift covered a variety of subjects. A brief mention of these serves to underscore Moehler's breadth of interest and ability. They are as follows: an investigation into the dispute between St. Jerome and St. Augustine on verse 14 of the second chapter of Galatians; a critical inquiry into the period of publication of the Epistle to Diognetus and an analysis of its content; a treatise on clerical celibacy; an investigation into the historical relation of the university to the state; fragments on the false decretals; and essay on the relation of Islam to the Gospel; another essay on the origins of Gnosticism; an essay on St. Simonianism; sketches of the abolition of slavery; a letter to Abbé Bautain on his system of philosophy; and two articles on the imprisonment of the Archbishop of Cologne.[16]

In 1825 Moehler's first book was published under the title Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholizismus dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte at Tübingen. The topic of this work was the unity of the Church or "the Catholic principle as contained in the spirit of the Church Fathers in the first three

centuries." The book was well-received and associated its author with a new spirit "which seemed to herald a rejuvenescence of the Church and of theological science."[17] The work reflected the profound influence that his reading of the Church Fathers had on his conception of Christianity and the development of the Church. It was intended to be primarily a historical work, "though perhaps it is even more the witness of a living inner experience in contact with the Church Fathers."[18]

In 1826, upon the appearance of Die Einheit, Moehler was offered a position in the University of Freiburg. He refused it remaining at Tübingen as a newly appointed extraordinary professor. Two years later, after declining another offer from Breslau, he became an ordinary professor in Tübingen's theological faculty, receiving simultaneously the Doctorate of Theology. During these years, Moehler continued his studies of ecclesiastical history, lecturing on this subject at Tubingen and writing of it in the Quartalschrift.

As evidence of his sustained interest in this subject matter Moehler produced two volumes on Athanasius and published an article on Anselm in the Quartalschrift. The first work entitled "Athanasius der Grosse und Die Kirche seiner Zeit im Kampfe mit dem Arianismus" (1827) portrayed the chief character as the hero of his time and the champion of orthodoxy amidst the great ecclesiastical conflicts with the Arian heresy in the fourth century. Moehler paid particular attention to Athanasius' evangelical orientation and his scientific attitude. Similarly, in the article about St. Anselm of Canterbury, Moehler depicted his hero of the Middle Ages as the scholar and defender of ecclesiastical liberty in an attempt to rehabilitate scholasticism.[19]

Continuing in his systematic study of the ecclesiastical life of the Church, Moehler came to the Reformation, his examination of which concentrated on the distinctive differences between Catholicism as the thesis and Protestantism as the antithesis. This investigation was published as Betrachtungen über den Zustand der Kirche im fünfzehnten und zu Anfang des sechsehnten Jahrhunderts. The Reformation, he concluded though necessary in the sixteenth century, did not take place in the right way. It rather took on "the character of an entirely revolutionary movement by which the tranquil development of the medieval Church, with all its good elements, was disturbed and an end put to ecclesiastical unity."[20] Augmenting his written studies on the confessional differences, Moehler began a course of lectures on the conflicts between Catholicism and Protestantism as represented in their respective symbolism.

Symbolism as a topic of study is defined as

> the distinctive notes of a given ecclesiastical communion, also certain set formulae, legally consecrated, and in a general way expressive of Christian faith or of certain fundamental dogmatic ideas; or again, especially since the Reformation . . . the confessions of faith that constitute the form or rule of belief for the faithful of any religious denomination.[21]

In judging that the most effective method to create a needed Catholic awareness was to set forth the points of doctrine which divided the Churches through investigations into the public formularies of the respective communities and the private writings of the Reformers and their disciples, Moehler's lectures on symbolism foreshadowed the content of his greatest work.

Reflecting the influence of Planck whose first effort it had been to comprehend all Christian creeds in their distinctive characteristics,

Moehler became the first Catholic writer to develop this idea, founding a science of theology by virtue of his classic work issued in 1832 known as Symbolik oder Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften. The sensation it produced throughout both Catholic and Protestant Germany was "prodigious, perhaps unparalleled in the history of modern theological literature. . . ."[22] Schleiermacher himself declared it to be the severest blow ever dealt to Protestantism. Even in France the effect was felt as "a Germany with one voice extols the merits of Moehler's Symbolism," so stated the journal L'Université Catholique.[23] Indicative of the demand, Symbolik passed through five editions in the course of six years, totalling from fifteen to twenty thousand copies.

The reaction stirred in Protestant circles by his work made Moehler the object of their criticism as well as their praise. Numerous articles by German Protestants appeared in response to the challenge offered by Symbolik. Moehler's most hostile opponent however, was his Tübingen colleague Baur, whose attack on Moehler was quite a "prolix rejoinder of abuse."[24] entitled "Der Gegensatz des Katholicismus und Protestantismus, nach den Principen und Hauptdogmen der beiden Lehrbegriffe." Replying to Baur in the 1834 work "Neue Untersuchungen der Lehrgegensätze zwischen den Katholiken und Protestanten. Eine Verteidigung meiner Symbolik gegen die Kritik des Herrn Prof. D. Baur," Moehler achieved greater clarity of his ideas and their criticisms. However, Moehler's situation at Tübingen had deteriorated as a result of Baur's personal acrimony and certain intrigues[25] geared to discredit him. Moehler's wish to leave Tübingen prompted the Prussian government

to offer the illustrious theologian a position at Bonn; however negotiations fell through as a result of Prof. Hermes, a strict rationalist who opposed romantic ideas.

Meanwhile, Döllinger, a close friend acting in Moehler's behalf at Munich, succeeded in getting him an appointment to the Catholic theological faculty there, lecturing on the exegesis of the New Testament. Moehler's opening lectures on St. Paul's epistle to the Romans came to incorporate the topics of Church history and patrology. In the more favorable circumstances at Munich, his health which had begun to fail him at Tübingen improved. In 1836, however, after a mild attack of cholera which had not affected him, Moehler was struck by a pulmonary ailment which necessitated his virtual retirement and began his ultimate demise. Before this, however, Moehler was once again offered the theological chair at Bonn which he was forced now to refuse for physical as well as the political reasons. Upon hearing that climatal change might effect a cure of the theologian's condition, the King of Bavaria, having previously conferred the Order of St. Michael upon him, made Moehler dean of the Cathedral at Würzburg in 1838. Unfortunately Moehler died a few weeks later on April 12, 1838, not yet forty-two years of age.

Of the achievements of this man's short life, the words of Dr. Reithmayr written to James Burton Robertson offer the best summary and testimonial:

> Powerful as his influence over Southern Germany had become, great as was his authority, honoured as was his name, and mighty as was the impulse had given to the public mind, he was yet far from entertaining the thought of wishing to form a school, in so far as we thereby understand a certain

> peculiar theological system, whether its nature consists in a special theoretical method, or in the adoption and more precise development of certain opinions. His faith was of a much too positive kind; he was too removed from all hollow speculation; and his whole intellectual cultivation was too strongly historical, and he was withal too modest, to wish to bring his own person thus prominently forward, or to stamp upon other minds the impress of his own individual conceptions. If anything can be said to characterize, or distinguish in any degree his auditors and admirers, it is a certain idealism in the treatment of science, an enthusiasm for the institutes and interests of the Church, abhorrence of all sectarianism, and a closer attachment to the mother Church of Rome.[26]

It is against this biographical background we can trace the formation and development of his ideas.

CHAPTER III

FOOTNOTES

[1]Hervé Savon, Johann Adam Moehler: The Father of Modern Theology, trans. by Charles McGarth, (Glen Rock, New Jersey: Deus Books, 1966), p. 18.

[2]Ibid., p. 19.

[3]Patricius Schlager, "Moehler, Johann Adam," The Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. X, (15 vols.; New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1913), p. 430.

[4]Goyau, L'Allemagne, II, 25.

[5]Savon, p. 21.

[6]Ibid., p. 22.

[7]Theologische Quartalschrift (1823), p. 264, as cited by Savon, p. 25.

[8]Theologische Quartalschrift (1823), p. 267, cited by Savon, p. 25.

[9]Savon, p. 26.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Savon, p. 28.

[12]Ibid., p. 29.

[13]"Introduction to the History of the Church," published by Döllinger in Gesammalte Schriften und Aufsätze, II, (Regensburg, 1840), p. 262.

[14]Ibid., p. 263.

[15]Ibid., p. 272.

[16]Collected and published by Döllinger in two volumes as cited above.

[17]Schlager, p. 430.

[18]Savon, p. 53.

[19]Ibid., p. 63.

[20]Schlager, p. 430.

[21]Ibid.

[22]James Burton Robertson, "Memoir of Dr. Moehler," in his translation of Moehler's Symbolism or Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by their Symbolical Writings, (3rd ed.; New York: The Catholic Publication House, 1905), lxxxi.

[23]xi, p. 75 as quoted by Robertson in "Memoir," lxxxi.

[24]Schlager, p. 431.

[25]Robertson, lxxxvi.

[26]Ibid., cii.

CHAPTER IV

MOEHLER'S HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

> How is it possible for the truth given by Christ to have a history? We cannot conceive of a history in any other way than that some object passes through a series of changes. But it has been said that the truth revealed and imparted by Christ is to remain as it was originally given. Here, therefore, there does not seem to be any object of history present. For that which abides transcends all change; it is a continuous being, not a becoming.[1]

Here is Moehler, the historical theologian, posing the dilemma of Catholic theology in the early nineteenth century. He recognized the paradox of a historical theology yet felt the necessity of resolving the anomalous connection if Catholicism was to be revitalized and was to progress. Moehler's historical consciousness is one of the most striking aspects of his writing, especially in Symbolism which was his most deliberate attempt to reconcile history and theology. Some discussion of Moehler's methodology as articulated in this major work seems necessary in evaluating his contribution to Catholic theology in particular and to German intellectual thought in general.

In the Introduction to Part I of Symbolism where he discusses the nature, extent and sources of symbolism, Moehler defines symbolism as "the scientific[2] exposition of the doctrinal differences among the various religious parties opposed to each other . . . " His study of symbolic difference centered upon those that lay between Catholicism and Protestantism. Calling symbolism a "scientific exposition" of doctrinal differences seems quite contradictory until he goes on to say

that symbolism has "neither a polemical nor an apologetical aim." It is rather "only to give a statement, to furnish a solid and impartial account . . . ." Moehler would seem to be making doctrinal matters to some degree an object of rational, scientific study.

Moehler does not however completely discount the subjective aspects of doctrinal writings which will assume indirectly "partly a defensive, partly an offensive character; for the personal convictions of the writer will involuntarily appear and be heard . . . ." He does not think this will impair the "mere explanatory and narrative character" of symbolism just as with "the historical relation, in which the historian conceals not his own personal opinion respecting the personages brought forward and the facts recounted." Moehler's sensitivity to the qualitative nuances of subjective matters does not permit him to divest symbolism of these subtleties. Implied in this thinking is his awareness of both the subjective and objective content of history.

Moehler's basic concern is to substantiate the "claims of a deeper science" which he believes symbolism can be. This cannot be done unless the "exposition assume, in part a polemical, in part an apologetical character." He felt a "bare narrative of facts, even when accompanied with the most impartial and most solid historical research, will not suffice." Now he attributes to the method itself the same qualitative subtleties as he recognized in the object of the method. This is a shift from symbolism as the objectively "solid and impartial account" to symbolism as a subjective commentary on a system of doctrine. At this point, however, it is not entirely clear

how Moehler intended to save symbolism from the subjectivity of its own argument.

Returning to the method of symbolism as a scientific exposition Moehler said, " . . . the individual proportions of a system of doctrine[3] must be set forth in their mutual concatenation and their organic connexion /sic/." In order to do this he said that

> it will be necessary to decompose a dogma into the elements out of which it has been formed, and to reduce it to the ultimate principles whereby its author had been determined; there, it will be expedient to trace the manifold changes which have occurred in the dogma.

Here is the real essence of Moehler's symbolism as a historical method for studying doctrinal theology. First, he viewed a system of doctrine as an organic whole, the parts of which are causally dependent. Secondly, dogma that must be decomposed into various elements out of which it has been formed suggests that theology for Moehler is not that which "transcends all change;" nor is it "a continuous being, not a becoming." Although he speaks of "ultimate principles" to which dogma must be reduced, the point of this reduction is to gain insight into what determined the author at some point in time to his particular interpretation. The importance of relativity in symbolic works is just as apparent to Moehler as it is with reference to historical writings.

The most crucial point of Moehler's statement on symbolism is, however, " . . . the manifold changes which have occurred in dogma . . ." and the expediency he places on tracing these changes. This is truly a unique idea with respect to the essence of theology. If change is possible in dogma, the formally and authoritatively affirmed truths

of the Church, then a history of theology is indeed possible even mandatory to understanding the Church as the historical phenomenon it is.

Moehler concludes his introductory remarks about symbolism and the study of dogma by attesting to the organic nature of the doctrinal system, in which "the parts must be viewed in their relation to the whole, and be referred to the fundamental and all-pervading idea." After having carefully subjected the different confessions to this "analytical process . . . the conformity of the one, and the opposition of the other to universally acknowledged truths must follow as a matter of course."

Moehler made an attempt to study the development of dogma as a historical phenomenon. He did not, however, employ a strictly historical methodology in his study of dogma as did later theologians, notably Cardinal Newman.[4] His effort was well within a Catholic orientation and terminology even though his inspiration came from Protestant works on the notion of the history of dogma. He often quoted from Planck's History of the Rise, the Changes, and the Formation of the Protestant System of Doctrine. Ultimately, however, Moehler's chief contribution was the critical, comparative approach to the study of doctrinal differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. For,

> . . . as the tenets of Protestantism have sprung only out of opposition to Catholic doctrine, they can be understood only in this opposition: and, therefore, the Catholic thesis must be paralleled with the Protestant anti-thesis, and compared with it in all its bearings, if the latter would be duly appreciated. On the other hand, the Catholic doctrine will then only appear in its true light, when confronted with the Protestant.[5]

The dialectic employed by Moehler is Hegelian to the extent that it is a method based on the concept of the contradiction of opposites; however, the universal polarity notion of Goethe is perhaps closer to the real organic meaning and relationship that Moehler wishes to attach to the Church as both thesis and synthesis. The Church contains the elements of difference within it just as does the universe. These differences as expressed in the Church's members comp lement one another by virtue of their difference, and are ever becoming more fully realized and perfected. The reformers did not take this aspect of the Church's flexibility into consideration. As Moehler himself admitted, "rarely, even in the Catholic Church was the right view unfolded with perfect scientific exactness, and brought back by means of an accurate philology to its first principles."[6] Recognizing that "it is for science to restore the connexion /sic/ between cause and effect, between the basis and the superstructure of the edifice . . . ,"[7] Moehler employed symbolism as his scientific tool to regain the real substance of Catholicism.

Moehler regarded the basic controversy between Protestantism and Catholicism as exclusively a difference in their respective anthropology. As he stated in Symbolism,

> . . . it will be shown that whatever other things may be connected with this, they are all mere necessary deduction from the answer given to the anthropological question mooted by the Reformers.[8]

This question of the primitive state of man and the origin of evil is the crux of difference between Protestants and Catholics. In the Lutheran estimation man is basically depraved and sin is his natural

state. The will of man can do no other than sin against the law of God. Therefore, nothing that man does in terms of good acts can possibly justify him in the sight of God. Man is saved rather by an act of the will of God--nothing else. To the Catholic, on the other hand, man is by nature good, having been made in the image and likeness of God, the creator. Sin is the state of separation of man from God and is unnatural. Man was also created with a will to do either good or evil as he chooses and sin represents the choice of man to do the latter. To regain the favor of God, another act of the human will is required in the form of penance. Reunion with God is still an act of the will of God, but in the Catholic framework God is forgiving of his creatures' errors.

Moehler saw Luther's ideas as an original system in the sense that it represents ". . . only an individuality exalted into a generality . . . "[9] Luther's criticism of Catholicism and its doctrinal errors were necessary to substantiate his anthropological view of man's relationship to God. The thorny problem of justification by faith versus works as the essential difference between the confessions is but the natural conclusion to which the Lutheran anthropology led. If man's nature is incapable in itself of doing good, the redemptive act is not cooperative and justification remains exterior. Man is a passive element in the salvation drama, believing in the merits of Christ only out of fear and desperation. The underlying principle here Moehler called the doctrine of "extrinsic justification":

> This thesis of man's non-cooperation rests on Luther's and Melancthon's primordial hypothesis of the absolute passivity of created spirit with regard to its Creator.[10]

The inevitable conclusion is the dogma of predestination.

Faith as man's relationship to God is necessarily different in the two religious frameworks. Summarizing the Catholic notion of faith Moehler said: "It is the reestablishment of union with God in Christ, principally by means of knowledge, which more or less involves the awakening of different feeling." Justification consists of an inner transformation of the whole man and faith remains the first necessary subjective condition.[11] Moehler saw that the divergence commenced "when the objective must become subjective--when the question regards the conditions under which that institution of salvation is to conduce towards our personal salvation."[12]

> If faith be taken in an objective sense that is to say, as an establishment instituted by God, in Jesus Christ, in opposition to Mosaism, or any human and arbitrary system of religion, and the modes of thinking, feeling, and acting, which such prescribe, then the Catholic can without restriction assert: it is by faith alone, man is able to acquire God's favor: there is none given to men whereby they may be saved, save Christ Jesus alone.[13]

The good work that the Catholic views as having merit is so only as long as it reflects the inner faith and conviction of man. The Protestant man is made incapable of manifesting himself as such because his faith is a gift from God requiring no act of the will. It therefore does not live in the sense that man's acceptance unites him with Christ, for man has no capacity to resist faith if given to him by God.

Moehler disagreed with Luther on the fundamental interpretation of man's will because it represented an all-pervasive anthropological view of man that was totally unacceptable to the Catholic mind. Doctrinal differences that had hitherto been the center of debates and

refutations between Catholics and Protestants were not the real, substantial issues. With regard to dogma Moehler said they are "pre-existing . . . existing prior to opinions so that they can exist after them and, therefore, be scientifically treated without them and quite independent of them . . . ."[14] whereas in the Protestant articles of faith, dogma is "equally subjective with the causes, which cooperated in its production, and has no other stay nor value than what they afford."[15]

He goes on to say that this distinction between individual opinion and common doctrine "presupposes a very strongly constituted community, based at once on history, on life, on tradition, and is only possible in the Catholic Church."[16] The idea of community expressed here will become the main thrust of Moehler's explanation of Catholicism's dynamism; however, he qualifies the recognition of this communal identity by saying " . . . unity in its essence is not identity." He saw the necessity of affording "such scope to the free expansion of individual exertion, as is compatible with the existence of the commonweal . . . ." Moehler declared it to be of defective insight to confuse various expositions by individuals of the doctrines of the Church with the teachings of the Church itself:

> For a time, even a conception of dogma, or an opinion may be tolerably general, without however, becoming an integral portion of a dogma, or a dogma itself. There are here eternally changing individual forms of a universal principle, which may serve this or that person, or a particular period for mastering that universal principle by way of reflection and speculation--forms which may possess more or less truth, by whereon the Church pronounces no judgment; for the data for such a decision are wanting in tradition, and she abandons them entirely to the award of theological criticism.[17]

Attention must now be given to Moehler's concepts of the Church, its community and tradition, and the meaning of dogma and doctrine within the Catholic frame of reference.

Moehler's notion of the Church:

> By the Church on earth, Catholics understand the visible community of believers, founded by Christ in which, by means of an enduring apostleship, established by him, and appointed to conduct all nations, in the course of ages, back to God, the work wrought by him during his earthly life, for the redemption and sanctification of mankind, are under the guidance of his spirit, continued to the end of the world.[18]

The Catholic Church as "the visible community of believers" continues the work and teaching of Christ "to the end of the world." Moehler's concept of the visible church is closely connected to the Incarnation of Christ whereby the Word assumed a corporeal form and expressed itself in an outward, perceptible, and human manner. Otherwise, if Christ and his teachings had remained in the realm of the spirit carried within the hearts of men, only an invisible Church would have been established. In essence, the Church acting as the visible human medium of Christian doctrine is actually the Son of God permanently incarnate.

The importance that Moehler placed on the incarnation is central to his whole concept of the visible Church. The Church as the permanently incarnate Christ derives from Moehler's notion of the "historical Christ":

> The Church, considered in one point of view, is the living figure of Christ, manifesting himself and working through all ages, whose atoning and redeeming acts, it, in consequence, eternally repeats, and uninterruptedly continues. The Redeemer not merely lived eighteen hundred years ago, so that he hath since disappeared, and we retain but an

> historical rememberance of him, as of a deceased man: but he is, on the contrary, eternally living in his Church; in the sacrament of the altar he hath manifested this in a sensible manner to creatures endowed with senses . . . If Christ, concealed under an earthly veil, unfolds, to the end of time, his whole course of actions begun on earth, he of necessity, eternally offers himself to the Father as a victim for men; and the real permanent exposition hereof can never fail in the Church, if the historical Christ is to celebrate in her his imperishable existence.[19]

From the notion that Christ is alive in the Church one can be logically drawn to the infallibility of the Church in its teaching of Christian doctrine.

However, Moehler was more concerned with clarifying the real meaning of Christ and Church as both existing and continuing in a historical sense. Speaking of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist he said it was more than mere symbolism of the Last Supper. It followed to Moehler that

> . . . with faith in the real existence of Christ in the Eucharist, the past becomes the present . . . the effects of this faith on the mind, heart, and will of man are quite other than if, by the mere stretch of the human faculty of memory Christ be called back from the distance of eighteen hundred years.[20]

Finally, in answer to the attempts of men such as Schleiermacher, trying to make religion a function of the human soul, Moehler used a similar argument:

> He lays before his God the lofty conceptions that have sprung out of the fulness /sic/ of his intellectual powers, his holy feelings, and inflexible resolves; these have no reference to the outward historical Christ, but only to the ideal one, which is merged in the subjectivity of these feelings and ideas . . . [21]

Moehler is obviously attempting to create an objective reality in which Christ as an historical fact continues to live in the visible

expression or form of himself--the Church as the community of believers. This gives the Church and the Catholic religion an objective rather than subjective existence which goes beyond the mere external aspects of religious practice:

> As from the beginning, the abstract "idea" and the positive history, doctrine and fact, internal and external truth, inward and outward testimony, were organically united; so must religion and the Church be conjoined, and this for the reason, THAT GOD BECOME MAN.[22]

Moehler defined the ecclesiastical consciousness of the Church as the visible body of Christ as being tradition in the "subjective sense" of the word:

> The peculiar Christian sense existing in the Church and transmitted by ecclesiastical education; yet this sense is not to be conceived as detached from its subject matter--nay, it is formed in, and by this matter, so it may be called a full sense. Tradition is the living word, perpetuated in the hearts of believers. To this sense . . . the interpretation of Holy Writ is entrusted.[23]

It is important to note that Moehler distinguished two senses of the meaning of tradition. The first he discussed is tradition in the subjective sense as it represented the ecclesiastical consciousness of the Church as Christ. In a second, objective sense Moehler called tradition "the general faith of the Church through all ages, manifested by outward historical testimonies . . . "[24] The organic notion of religion pervades the concept of tradition as, from the subjective sense of the Church's own consciousness, it comes to represent the collective faith of the Church throughout the ages. Just as the Incarnation of Christ required the visible, human medium of the Church to continue throughout time, so does the faith of man require a norm of objective evidence, a rule of faith which is tradition.

To further substantiate his meaning of tradition and the role it plays in the Church Moehler continued by example:

> By adherence to Scripture, the individual Christian could undoubtedly convince himself that the Gnostics were involved in grievious errors. Of this he was subjectively certain: But as the adversary had the like subjective conviction, that the true Christian view of the world was to be found on his side, the objectivity of Christianity would have necessarily disappeared, if, besides the Bible, there had not been a rule of faith, to wit, universal tradition. Without this rule, it would ever be impossible to determine with positiveness, safety, and general obligation, the peculiar doctrines of Christianity.[25]

Tradition, while based primarily on the faith of the community, encompasses other writings than just Scriptures from which it derives the content of Christianity. The objective sense of tradition actually incorporates much "historical testimony" into its content such as the writings of the Church Fathers and council decisions.

It is tradition being both subjective and objective reality at one and the same time that gives the Catholic Church its authority. Comparing this authority of the Church to history Moehler concluded:

> . . . a positive religion, if destined to act a permanent and decisive authority on mankind, must be imparted to successive generations, through the medium of an authority. In the application of this truth, however, an illusion may easily occur. Thus we may imagine that the ordinary mode, in which a historical fact is attested may here suffice; and that thus, if credible eyes and ear witnesses have delivered a written testimony respecting the divine envoy, their evidence should constitute an adequate and lasting authority for all time . . . [26]

Moehler, however, is aware of the problem of historical relativity and in this comparison of history and Catholicism, he continues to show the problem as it exists uniquely in sacred history:

> The sacred historians, the Christian, in fact, by no means ranks in the same class with other writers of history, nor,

> on that account, the readers of the Bible with those of any other historical work. We hold it to be necessary that under quite special conditions, the evangelical historians should have written down their narratives, in order not to be disturbed by the doubt, whether they had in reality rightly heard, seen, and understood. For this reason, from the foundation of Christianity, it has been deemed a matter of necessity, that only under certain peculiar conditions could the right understanding of the sacred penmen be secured, in order that we might have the decided conviction, that what they recorded without falsification, we apprehend without confusion.[27]

It is by the rule of faith that the correct understanding of the sacred penmen is possible, whereby the relativism that could plague religious matters transmitted through history and men is properly accounted for. After the Divine Word becomes human faith, it must be subject to all mere human destinies:

> It must be constantly received by all the energies of the human mind, and inbibed by the same. The preservation and communication of the Word were, in like manner, attached to a human method.[28]

Moehler showed that the Church was the embodiment of a living, historical Christ in a community of believers whose rule of faith, tradition, carried on the words and works of Christ throughout history and time in both a subjective and objective sense. However, the body of doctrine which is the Word of God as transmitted by the Church's authority is yet another aspect of the objective sense of tradition, subject to the process of history and the problem of relativism. It was in this area that Moehler was most determined that history and theology be reconciled for the apparent rigidity of the Catholic concept of doctrine had stifled the adaptability to progress in the early nineteenth century of Catholicism as compared to Protestantism. Through his studies of Protestant thought and particularly of the history of dogma as formulated in the apostolic and

patristic ages of the Church, Moehler concluded that doctrine was also subject to the process of history and, therefore, to change, at least in the subjective sense:

> The fact that the deeper consciousness of Christ in truth (in itself eternally one and unchangeable), is the result of contest and struggle, and consequently a matter of history, is of too much importance not to detain our attention for some moments . . . [29]

> The application of the energies of the human mind to the subject matter, received from the Lord, on the one hand, to be analyzed, and on the other hand, to be reduced to certain leading points; and the multiplicity of objects to be contemplated in their mutual bearings, and resolved into a higher unity, whereby the human mind obtained, on these matters, greater clearness and definiteness of conception. For everything that the human mind hath received from an external source, and which is destined to become its property, wherein it must find itself perfectly at home, must be first reproduced by that mind itself.[30]

Moehler, unlike Luther, obviously placed the human mind in the active role of determining the content of its faith by processes of thought and reason. Again the difference between subjective and objective content is emphasized when the human mind must subjectify the input of even the Word of God in order to comprehend the fullness of its meaning in an objective sense of its higher unity. However, although

> the original doctrine, as the human mind had variously elaborated it, exhibited itself in a much altered form: it remained the original, and yet did not; it was the same in substance, yet differed as to form.[31]

Where protesters failed to grasp the role of tradition in alleviating that state of relativism to which doctrine could be relegated as a result of the human process, doctrine lost its objective immutability. Moehler, however, by retaining tradition as the source of divine authority could say that doctrine, bound to

change in the external form due to the subjective processes of both the human mind and history, will not suffer a loss of objective truth. Hence a development of doctrine is possible and tradition is further substantiated as comprising two equally vital aspects of doctrine--its development as well as its conservation.[32]

Moehler did not go expressly beyond the idea that doctrine was capable of development to an actual theory of that developmental process. However, implicit in his concept of heresy and its role in the life of the Church is the necessary dynamic for doctrinal change. Moehler acknowledged that the Church's doctrine was in conformity with the doctrine of the Scriptures only in its substance, not in its form. Additionally,

> In respect to the latter /the Church's doctrine/, a diversity is found inherent in the very essence and object of the Church, so that, indeed if the divine truth must be preserved and propagated by human organs, the diversity we speak of could not possibly be avoided . . . [33]

The differences in doctrinal form, then, are a necessary consequence of the nature of the organic community of believers, which not only consists of its members' shared faith but also of its members' inherent human differences.

Moehler's analysis of the development of doctrine by the Church is important enought to present here in its entirety:

> When, in the manner described, the Church explains and secures the original doctrine of faith against misrepresentations; the apostolic expression is necessarily changed for another, which is the most fitted alike to set forth and reject the particular error of the time. As little as the apostles themselves, in the course of their polemics, could retain the form, wherein the Saviour expounded his divine doctrine; so little was the Church enabled to adhere to the same. If the evangelical doctrine be assailed by a definite theological system, and by a terminology

peculiar to itself; the false notions cannot by any means be repelled in a clear, distinct, evident, and intelligible manner, unless the Church have regard to the form of the error, and exhibit its thesis in a shape, qualified by the garb, wherein the adverse doctrine is invested, and thus render itself intelligible to all contemporaries. The origin of the Nicene formula furnishes the best solution to this question. This form is in itself the human, the temporal, the perishable element, and might be exchanged for a hundred others. Accordingly, tradition often hands down to later generations the original deposit in another form, because that deposit hath been entrusted to the care of men, whose conduct must be guided by the circumstances wherein they are placed.

Lastly, in the same manner as in the Apostolic writings, the truths of salvation are laid open with greater clearness and in all their mutual organic connection; so, in the doctrine of the Church, the doctrine of the Scripture is ever progressively unfolded to our view. Dull, therefore, as it is, to find any other than a mere formal distinction, between the doctrine of Christ and that of his apostles; no less senseless is it, to discover any other difference, between the primitive and the later tradition of the Church. The blame of this formal distinction arises from overlooking the fact, that Christ was a God-man, and wished to continue working in a manner conformable to his two-fold nature.

Moreover, the deeper insight of the human mind into the divine revelations in Christ seems determined by the struggles of error against Christian truth. It is to the unenlightened zeal of the Jewish Christians for the law, we owe the expositions of Paul touching faith and the power of the Gospel: and to the schisms in Corinth we are indebted for his explanation of principles, in respect to the Church.
The Gnostic and Manichean errors led to a clearer insight into the character of evil, destitute of, and opposed to, all existence as it is, as well as to a maturer knowledge of the value of God's original creation (nature and freedom), and its relation to the new creation in Christ Jesus. Out of the Pelagian contest arose a fuller and more conscious recognition of human infirmity, in the sphere of true virtue; and so have matters gone on down to our days. It would be ridiculous, on the part of Catholics, to deny as a foolish boast of Protestants (should the latter be inclined to claim any merit in the case), that the former had gained much from the controversy between them. By the fall of the Protestants, the Catholics necessarily rose; and from the obscurity which overclouded the minds of the reformers, a new light was cast upon the truth; and such indeed had ever been the case in all earlier schisms in the Church. Assuredly, in Christian knowledge we stand one degree higher than the period prior to the Reformation; and all the dogmas that

> were called in question, received such an elucidation and confirmation that it would require no very diligent or long-continued comparison between the modern theological works, and those written prior to the Council of Trent, to see the important difference which, in this respect, exists between the two epochs.[34]

From this lengthy analysis of doctrine and heresy within the Church, Moehler's theory of the development of doctrine can be clearly understood. Surely the evolutionary nature of doctrine as it is challenged and as it responds must bear a close connection to the Hegelian dialectic, at least in form if not content. For this reason, I venture to say that Moehler's theory of doctrinal development is by all rights also a method. This method may not explain the internal changes that doctrine must undergo as a rearticulation is needed to combat a misrepresentation; however, the necessary movement that his concepts of heresy and doctrine exhibit indicates the process of change and development in a most natural and acceptable form given the nature of the Church.

CHAPTER IV

FOOTNOTES

[1]Jaroslav Pelikan, Historical Theology: Continuity and Change in Christian Doctrine, Historical Resources, (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1971) xiii.

[2]Moehler's use of the term "scientific" is meant to refer to a critical, objective study of documents and sources, whereby the true meaning of doctrine can be ascertained.

[3]"System of doctrine" is used by Moehler to denote the organic unity of divine truth which doctrine forms in the objective, historical sense. It follows from this classification that doctrine is capable of being studied within its organic context.

[4]See John Henry Newman's An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, introduction by G. Weigel, (New York, 1960).

[5]Moehler, Symbolism, trans. by James Burton Robertson, 5th ed., (London: Thomas Baker, 1906), p. 7.

[6]Ibid., p. 99.

[7]Ibid., p. 7.

[8]Ibid., p. 8.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid., p. 110.

[11]Savon, Moehler, p. 87.

[12]Moehler, Symbolism, 3rd ed., p. 145.

[13]Ibid., pp. 145-46.

[14]Ibid., 5th ed., p. 7.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., p. 8.

[18]Ibid., p. 258.

[19]Ibid., p. 231.

[20]Ibid., p. 235.

[21]Ibid., p. 237.

[22]Ibid., p. 263.

[23]Ibid., p. 279.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., p. 284.

[26]Ibid., 3rd ed., p. 310.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., 5th ed., p. 289.

[29]Ibid., p. 291.

[30]Ibid., p. 289.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Yves Congar, The Meaning of Tradition, vol. 3, of Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism, (200 vols.; New York: Hawthorne Books, 1964).

[33]Moehler, 5th ed., p. 288.

[34]Ibid., pp. 290-91.

CHAPTER V

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND SOME INTERPRETATIONS

The literature on Moehler does not abound. For the English scholar there is also the fact that most of what is written is in German or French and is not readily accessible. Most histories of theology only mention Moehler and the Tübingen movement in passing, if at all. However, there are a number of works that deal specifically with Moehler's ideas. Two English bibliographies when combined offer the most comprehensive source of reference. The first appears in an article on Moehler's ecclesiology written by Peter Riga for Theological Studies.[1] The second bibliography was included in a dissertation on Moehler's doctrinal development written by Henry R. Nienaltowski that was published by Catholic University.[2]

Moehler's major work, Die Symbolik, was translated into an English edition by James Burton Robertson which was published in London, 1834. Various editions of Robertson's translation are to be found primarily in Catholic university or seminary libraries. As far as I could determine none of Moehler's other works are available in English.

The first two volumes of the five-volume work by Georges Goyau previously mentioned[3] offer the best general account of the history of the Church in the nineteenth century. Goyau, however, going beyond the general statement of events discusses philosophical and theological content with subtle insight. Most noteworthy are his ease of style and

capable of error in doctrinal matters, bordered on an unorthodox, possibly heretical position. However, it is the evolutionary tendency towards orthodoxy present in Moehler's thinking which gains him his place in the history of the Church.

Interpretations of Moehler's ecclesiology are numerous and oftentimes contradictory. In an article on this topic, Peter Riga discussed three different writers' points of view on Moehler's concept of hierarchy. Aloys Schmid[6] declared that Moehler continued to profess a form of episcopalianism in his later thinking as that which he first articulated in Die Einheit. This would cast some doubt on the orthodoxy of Moehler's thought given his advocacy of a symbolic papacy in that work. Edmond Vermeil's dissertation[7] presented a view of Moehler's work as an entirely new revival of theology and the pastoral science, cluminating in the modernist movement, to which hierarchy was nothing more than a human institution. Finally K. Eschweiler,[8] interpreting Moehler's ecclesiology and theology as a basic confrontation and synthesis of German ideology and Catholic theology, saw hierarchy in this schema as the expression of the Christian community. Riga, on the other hand, rejected all these ideas by saying that their error lay in not viewing Moehler's hierarchy as merely a part of his entire system of thought as "it advanced little by little to an almost perfect Roman doctrine."[9] It should not have been made the point of departure that these respective writers seemed to emphasize.

Edmond Vermeil's work already referred to is the most innovative if not dubious interpretation of Moehler's ideas. His dissertation is subtitled "Etude sur la théologie romantique en Wütemberg et les origines

germaniques du modernisme." It was Vermeil's contention that Moehler's thinking contained the seeds of modernism, a movement which attempted to redefine Biblical and Christian dogma and teaching in the light of modern science.

Vermeil contended that the divine Spirit was the phenomenon manifested in the symbols, council decisions, and theological interpretations. Scripture in this framework is not absolutely necessary because "between the Scriptures and tradition, there is, like between the human and the divine, the rapport of reciprocity and collaboration."[10] As expressed in Symbolik, this principle is attended by the notion of human contigency. Vermeil refines these points to replace the immutability of dogma with the necessary development of dogma.

The modernist movement was condemned by Pius X in 1907, however, as a negation of faith. Although Moehler espoused a development of doctrine in the subjective sense, he never denied an objective immutability of the divine truth expressed therein, which Vermeil did not differentiate in his thinking. Nor can it ever be said that Moehler's concept of the Church as the visible expression of the living Word rests on anything more essential and less scientific than the fundamental faith of the community of believers.

A more positive as well as plausible description of Moehler's thinking and its consequences is offered by George H. Tavard: ". . . the first major development of what might be called a theology of ecumenism. . ."[11] He bases his argument upon Moehler's ideas of the unity of the Church and the nature of Protestantism. Tavard relates Moehler's analysis of Protestantism as the antithesis and the Catholic Church as

both the thesis and synthesis. As he says,

> The Church is a doctrinal synthesis. Protestantism monopolizing a number of Catholic truths and separating them from the root, is an antithesis. For the sake of argument, Catholicism would then appear as the thesis. In itself, it remains the synthesis into which the thesis and antithesis must be resolved. It is not thesis except in exercising an opposition to Protestantism . . . [quoting from Moehler] "The Catholic thesis must be placed parallel to the Protestant antithesis and must be compared with it in every point if the latter is to be well understood. Besides, Catholic doctrine does not show up in its true light except when faced with Protestant doctrine."[12]

This is well within the field of ecumenism.[13] The strictly objective method Moehler used is evidence of his honesty. Tavard, not wishing to exaggerate Moehler's importance, does feel that this new method of study did initiate ecumenical research. Again he quotes Moehler as he outlined his intentions in the preface to Symbolism:

> It seems to me that a real end to the differences that separate Christian communities is still a far way off. But by publishing a true exposition of the big dispute I have hoped to be able to do something with a view to furthering religious peace, and this will be realized to the extent that this exposition makes us see that this dispute is born of a profound desire on both sides to defend the truth, to defend pure and authentic Christianity in all its integrity.[14]

Such an attitude may well be evidence of constructive, ecumenical mentality in Moehler.

CHAPTER V

FOOTNOTES

[1]Peter Riga, "The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Moehler," Theological Studies, 22, (1961), pp. 563-87.

[2]Henry Raphael Nienaltowski, Johann Adam Moehler's Theory of Doctrinal Development: Its Genesis and Formulation, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), pp. 75-78. (A Ph.D. dissertation.)

[3]Supra., p. 13, n. 15.

[4]Goyau, II, 42.

[5]Yves Congar, "La pensée du Moehler et l'ecclesiologie orthodoxe," Irenikon, 12, (1935), pp. 321-29; "Sur l'evolution et l'interprétation de la pensée de Moehler," Révue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques, 27 (1938), pp. 205-12.

[6]Aloys Schmid, "Der geistige Entwicklungsgang J.A. Moehlers," Geheimrat Dr. Alois Ritter v. Schmid. Sein Leben und seine Schriften, by Schmid Andreas, (Ratisborn, 1911), pp. 296-378.

[7]Edmond Vermeil, Jean-Adam Moehler et l'Ecole catholique de Tubingue (1815-1840), (Paris, 1913).

[8]K. Eschweiler, Johann Adam Moehlers Kirchenbegriff, (Braunsberg in Pr., 1930).

[9]Riga, p. 565.

[10]Vermeil, p. 145.

[11]George H. Tavard, Two Centuries of Ecumenism: The Search for Unity, trans. by Royce W. Hughes, Mentor-Omega Books, (New York: The New American Library, 1960), p. 57.

[12]Ibid., p. 59.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In order to fully appreciate the importance of Moehler's historical ideas it is necessary to place him in a perspective to his German philosophical and intellectual heritage. His historical method is definitely a synthesis of many influences that fomented the early nineteenth century romantic movement. However, Moehler's method, though of primarily theological orientation, bears essential characteristics similar to theories of history contemporary to his day, particularly Ranke's, that have far-reaching consequences in the nineteenth century's search for historiographic method.

Many of the ideas Moehler employs represent systems of thought seemingly opposed to each other, for instance, the rationalism of Kant and the idealism of Hegel. With Kant Moehler shares a view that the human mind plays an active part in making knowledge its own. Moehler even goes so far as to say that the human mind must "inbibe" the divine truth contained in doctrine in order to make it subjectively known. Heresy and even the formulation of doctrine are primarily the result of this subjective, rational process of the human mind to comprehend truth's objective essence. The human mind, however, does not create the doctrine's truth, only its form which through time is ever-unfolding the ultimate truth behind it.

The evolutionary process of the truth being unfolded throughout time is how Moehler sought to unite history and religion. The idealism of Hegel is inherent in this union which gives credence to the historical reality of religion. The notion that truth is progressively being revealed tempers the aspects of a purely rational religion which the Kantian system was brought to proclaim and which is so antithetical to Catholicism. The historical reality of doctrine as immutable truth but truth which the human mind must subjectify in order to know represents a synthesis of Kantian rationalism and Hegelian idealism without the extreme positions of either system of thought.

The dialectical method of Hegel and the universal polarity concept of Goethe are also synthesized by Moehler. Moehler speaks of a Catholic thesis and a Protestant antithesis, the struggle of which is necessary for the greater clarification and understanding of divine truth. The result of the conflict of their respective ideas is the Catholic synthesis. Moehler's terminology is definitely Hegelian, but is the sense of what he is saying correspondingly Hegelian? It is to the degree that the process is a necessary evolution or unfolding of the divine truth within the context of the Church. However, the elements on which Moehler bases his concept of change are perhaps closer to the ideas of Goethe.

Hegel's dialectic contains the notion of opposition but not in Goethe's pure form. The notion of universal polarity contained in Moehler's thinking is that the Church contains within itself the elements of opposition or negation. These differences as they exist within the Church do not destroy the unity of the whole but rather complement it in

much the same way as do the forces of the universe or the inherent differences of human beings. It is when opposition goes from within the organic whole to the outside that something entirely different happens. As opposition is met by the Church within its context, development occurs which, however, does not destroy the past stages of development. I think it is the less rigidly systematized thought of Goethe Moehler sees in the language of Hegel's dialectic which best represents the dynamic growth and change capacity of the Church. As the synthesis, the Church then really contains both the thesis and the antithesis in the sense that within it exists different opinions and different human beings. In the sense of the formation of its doctrine, the Church generates its own dynamic of change.

Moehler's notion of faith bears some similarities to the romantic religion of feeling of Schleiermacher. Although Moehler has attempted to understand the elements of change and continuity within the Church through a "scientific" method of exposition, faith, the essence of any religion, is first of all a subjective sensation of love. It seeks to manifest itself in an objective sense because human beings live in the objective reality of forms. Faith cannot be understood or rationalized in its essence beyond that it exists in both an objective and a subjective form, these being the faith of the community and the individual's personal belief. Moehler carried the romantic notion of faith much further by giving it this dual nature, capable of both objective and subjective existence in the tradition of the Church.

Aspects of critical religion which form Moehler's historical theology can be seen as having their roots in the ideas of Lessing.

With Lessing's criticism of religion, the historicity of sources of religion becomes a fundamental element of the deepest sense of religious teachings. Moehler's interest in the historical testimony of religious sources is not based on philology or semantics but rather on the wish to reveal the spirit of religious truths which is contained in these sources and evidences of the immutability of the divine truth.

It is in this same spirit that Moehler is interested in biblical exegesis and critical biblical scholarship, begun by Richard Simon and applied by many, not as if the Bible were an absolute form of truth, but for the spirit it exhibits within the context of a history of dogma and doctrine as a relative form of divine truth that is constantly being revealed.

Moehler's thought then is a composite of many philosophical systems which have been selectively applied to the realm of theology. The effect, in terms of theology, was the creation of a historical method by which the development of doctrine could be explained and studied. However, as much as Moehler's historical ideas contributed to the study of theology in the nineteenth century, they also exhibited certain characteristics of the currents of historical theory which were to preoccupy German historians throughout the century as well. A very notable parallel in the field of history to Moehler's critical ideas and method is Leopold von Ranke. Ranke's system of thought may also be compared to Moehler with respect to the later interpretations which fail to do justice to the real substance of their thinking.

Ranke was almost an exact contemporary of Moehler, being born in 1795 and living, however, much longer than Moehler's forty-two years until 1888. Primarily a political historian, Ranke is attributed with

the development of modern historiographic science, based on critical study of primary sources in order to determine "wie es eigentlich gewesen." The phrase has come to be immediately associated with Rankean techniques of critical historical scholarship; however, it does not go beyond his method of history to his philosophy of history, and as such, offers only a narrow perspective of his entire system.

What Ranke sought to do by his "individualizing method" was to reach the theoretical foundations of history: "In and by means of the event, I have tried to portray the event's course and spirit and to define its characteristic traits. . ."[1] However, Ranke, while attempting to avoid the generalizing formulas of the Hegelian variety, realized that with no unifying element, history would have no meaning. Here he felt the necessity of an omnipotent God, whose presence in the world "prevents the alternative between the total determinism of fate and the materialist notion that all is contingent."[2] History is the process of life and of the spirit, and history as a science shares with philosophy the task of grasping the core of existence.

It was Ranke's belief in the existence of a deeper reality behind historical phenomenon that kept him from a strictly objective consideration of particular historical events. The objectivity he desired was for the exclusion of the individual historian's subjective prejudices from the study of history, not for an objectivity as demanded by a strict empirical methodology. Although Ranke maintained that man could only intuitively suspect the plan of the universe, he never considered individual historical events as not belonging to a greater context. There was always a totality, an integrated spiritual reality. Man could

come to sense the truth of this reality only through the rigorous study of the detail of historical reality. Lamprecht summarized Ranke's conceptions by saying they rested "first of all on the standpoint of personal faith and only secondarily on scientific inquiry."[3]

Moehler and Ranke share a personal religious belief that forms the basis of their respective critical systems. Likewise, although their respective subject matter be different, their goals are the same. Each man saw the imperative need for a critical method which could serve to integrate the different realities of history and theology. Both men's thought, however, was misunderstood by some thinkers, perhaps for much the same reasons. It would seem that in the nineteenth century's search for a method, the essential and necessarily subjective aspects of thinking were either forgotten or ignored. Neither Ranke nor Moehler could have abided by an empiricist's view of their respective subjects. Both men said this was impossible because objective truth is not completely recognizable to men. It must be constantly sought after in the subjective reality of human existence and apprehended by the most objective methods available to human reason given the nature of the subject to begin with.

The error of those who viewed Ranke's objective method as no more than "wie es eigentlich gewesen" and critics of Moehler such as Vermeil and the modernist argument is in misunderstanding the unity of the subjective and the objective in both the world and in men's thinking. To sacrifice the subjective more idealistic elements of Ranke and Moehler is to destroy the achievement of their respective critical methods as syntheses of these two elements.

Moehler's ideas, although uniquely applied to content of theology, were not entirely original. There is no evidence that either Moehler or Ranke ever read each other's work. The historical method each arrived at was the result of each individual's synthesis of his experience and exposure. Likewise, the theological concepts Moehler arrived at were by a similar assimilative process of his Catholic (and Protestant) experience. Other great thinkers however, were coming to much the same conclusions as did Moehler with respect to the development of doctrine. Cardinal Newman in England is the most notable example.

In the Introduction to his Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, Newman acknowledged the fact that the view which he is about to expound upon had "been implicitly adopted by theologians, and, . . . has recently been illustrated by several distinguished writers of the continent, such as de Maistre and Moehler. . ."[4] Jaroslav Pelikan, however, confirms from two different sources that there was no genealogical connection between Newman's thinking and Moehler's, nor for that matter, much reason to suspect scholarly commerce between Newman and Baur.[5] Newman's essay appearing in 1845, however, did contain many of the same ideas as Moehler's Symbolism with respect to the development of doctrine.

I personally feel that Newman's explanation of this developmental process is much more systematized than Moehler's. Newman offers seven "applications" whereby the true development of doctrine can contrast against corruption of doctrine. As far as I can determine, however, Newman does not view heresy or corruption of a doctrine in the same manner as Moehler. In Newman's frame of reference, a corruption is the

breaking up of life, preparatory to its termination.[6] He views this much more negatively than does Moehler, who sees heresy as the natural outcome of the imperfect subjective expression of the truth. The form of the heresy does not so much worry Moehler as it does Newman, nor, for that matter, does the form of doctrine so much concern Moehler as it does Newman. Moehler's system lacks the standards of form and content by which to compare corruption and development. His system is much more based on the organic nature of the entire religion, whereby the differences or oppositions that arise throughout the course of time are resolved much as the human body heals itself, becoming stronger in the process. Newman's emphasis on the historical existence of the Church and doctrine seems somehow more confined by objective scientific rules and norms of procedural correctness than perhaps Moehler's more romantic notion of tradition.

The richness of Moehler's thought lay in its blending of different elements--idealism, rationalism, romanticism, history, theology--to achieve a working synthesis that aptly describes the phenomenon of the Catholic Church, its continuity and its change.

CHAPTER VI

FOOTNOTES

[1]Georg Iggers, The German Conception of History, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), p. 65.

[2]Ibid., p. 69.

[3]Iggers, "Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought," History and Theory, vol. 2, 1962, p. 32.

[4]John Henry Newman, An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), p. 29.

[5]Historical Theology, p. 56.

[6]Newman, p. 170.

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